
From: Web NoReply
Sent: Monday, February 26, 2024 9:26 AM
To: City Council
Subject: Email - Communication - Michael Fitzsimmons - Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 Endorsement Request - CK 6003-1
Attachments: Saskatoon Freeway comments MF and CWT 2024 02 26.pdf
Categories: FILED

--- Replies to this email will go to [REDACTED] ---

Submitted on Monday, February 26, 2024 - 09:21

Submitted by user: [REDACTED]

Submitted values are:

I have read and understand the above statements.: Yes

I do not want my comments placed on a public agenda. They will be shared with members of Council through their online repository.: No

I only want my comments shared with the Mayor or my Ward Councillor.: No

Date: Monday, February 26, 2024

To: His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

First Name: Michael

Last Name: Fitzsimmons

Email: [REDACTED]

I live outside of Saskatoon: No

Saskatoon Address and Ward:

Address: [REDACTED] William Ave

Ward: Ward 7

Name of the organization or agency you are representing (if applicable): Typha Environmental Research and Consulting

What do you wish to do ?: Submit Comments

What meeting do you wish to speak/submit comments ? (if known):: Standing Policy Committee on Transportation

What agenda item do you wish to comment on ?: Saskatoon Freeway Planning Study – Phase 2 Endorsement Request

Comments:

Comments (see attached) co-authored by Colleen Watson-Turner.

Attachments:

Will you be submitting a video to be vetted prior to council meeting?: No

Comments on the Proposed Saskatoon Freeway

Michael Fitzsimmons and Colleen Watson-Turner
Typha Environmental Research and Consulting
Saskatoon, SK

1. Erroneous Justification for the Proposed Saskatoon Freeway

The most fundamental question of all is *should we build a new multi-lane freeway around Saskatoon?* The rationale for the proposed Saskatoon Freeway on the FAQ page of the saskatoonfreeway.org website is very brief. Astonishingly, it includes the following statement:

Greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles will be reduced by improving the flow of traffic and reducing congestion.

If one of the objectives is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, then the last thing Saskatchewan should do is to build 55 kilometers of additional superhighway.

The current trend in Canada is that the number of vehicles is ever-increasing, growing by 7% between 2017 and 2022.¹ Vehicle sizes and weights have also been increasing. All of this leads to more fossil fuel emissions from vehicle transportation. The only way to reverse this trend is to reduce the number and size of vehicles and distances travelled.

Building new roads was in the news recently. A prominent commentator stated that *there is a vast literature on this: Wherever and whenever roads are added, people respond by driving more.*² When highway capacity is expanded, development patterns are dispersed as households and businesses move to more distant locations and people choose longer routes and more distant destinations.³

We need to put the brakes on fossil fuel consumption given that, globally, *as many as 8.7 million deaths every year are attributable just to the outdoor particulate matter produced from burning fossil fuels.*⁴ That is many times more than all the annual number of deaths from influenza, Covid, war, murder and terrorism combined.

There is a larger context to consider as well. If we continue to design and develop additional infrastructure for use by private passenger vehicles and commercial trucks, we are then committed to ongoing and escalating carbon emissions from the resource extraction and manufacturing necessary to produce an ever-increasing fleet of cars and trucks (whether such vehicles are gas, diesel or electric).

We must think of bolder and more intelligent responses to climate breakdown.

¹ Statistics Canada. [Table 23-10-0308-01 Vehicle registrations, by type of vehicle and fuel type](https://doi.org/10.25318/2310030801-eng)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/2310030801-eng>

² Andrew Coyne. Guilbeault is right: Ottawa should get out of the road-building business. *The Globe and Mail*, Saturday February 17, 2024, page O2.

³ Susan Handy, 2015. Increasing Highway Capacity Unlikely to Relieve Traffic Congestion. National Center for Sustainable Transportation, University of California Davis [<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/58x8436d>].

⁴ David Wallace-Wells, 2021. Ten Million a Year. *London Review of Books*. 43(23)
[<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n23/david-wallace-wells/ten-million-a-year>]

2. Route Concepts 1, 2, 3 and 4 are Equally Foul

It is a waste of time and effort to evaluate which of the different route concepts might be preferable from an environmental perspective. Construction on any of the routes would destroy and fragment valuable grassland and wetland habitats (as well as arable land), impede the travel and natural behaviour of wildlife, spread invasive species, increase pollutant runoff, and intensify noise and light pollution.

No amount of environmental monitoring (snow-track surveys, grouse lek surveys, auditory amphibian surveys, ...) or adjustments to the alignment will in any way change the destructive impacts along the entire route of clearing off the topsoil and vegetation, excavating the subsoil, contouring ditches, bringing in granular fill, and then compacting and paving the new surface.

The great Canadian observer of the impacts of industrialization on nature, Edward Burtynsky, states that hidden behind every act of creation *is a greater act of destruction somewhere in nature*.⁵ How much land will be cleared for gravel pits to get the granular material needed for the proposed Saskatoon Freeway? How much open pit mining in the Tar Sands will occur to provide the bitumen for the pavement? How much water and sand will go into the hydraulic fracturing necessary to provide the petroleum energy used by the heavy equipment and trucks that build the freeway? How much iron ore will be mined to create the steel used to make the bridges? How much limestone, clay and sand will be mined to make the cement used for the overpasses?

Replacing areas of living ecosystems (wetlands, grasslands, farm fields, etc.) with the growing tentacles of the technosphere (cement, pavement, steel, etc.) will worsen our environmental predicament. Over the past century, global anthropogenic mass (defined as the mass of inanimate solid objects made by humans) has been doubling approximately every 20 years. As of the year 2020, anthropogenic mass now exceeds global biomass (defined as the mass of all plants, animals and other life forms).⁶ If young people today have any hope of a healthy environment in the future, surely this trend cannot continue indefinitely.

Stan Rowe, the late Professor Emeritus at the University of Saskatchewan, co-authored A Manifesto for Earth.⁷ The Manifesto includes the statement:

The chief threat to the Ecosphere's diversity, beauty and stability is the ever-increasing appropriation of the planet's goods for exclusive human use.

If we follow Principle 9 of that Manifesto, *Reduce Consumption of Earth Parts*, then we should reject Route Concepts 1, 2, 3 and 4 and explore alternatives to the Saskatoon Freeway.

We must begin the process of reducing the human footprint on Earth.

⁵ Edward Burtynsky, 2020. Changes We Don't See. National Geographic, April 2020: p. 27.

⁶ Emily Elhacham *et al.*, 2020. Global human-made mass exceeds all living biomass. Nature 588:442-444.

⁷ Ted Mosquin and Stan Rowe, 2006. A Manifesto for Earth in Stan Rowe, 2006. Earth Alive: Essays on Ecology. NeWest Press, Edmonton, AB., p. 258-259.

3. The Future of the Northeast Swale

The Northeast Swale is one of the most important natural areas in and near Saskatoon. It provides habitat for a rich diversity of plants and animals. It also performs important ecological functions such as water purification and carbon storage. The Northeast Swale was recently dissected once by McOrmond Drive. To dissect it again would be to add insult to injury.

To put a superhighway through precious pieces of remnant native prairie constitutes a thoroughly cynical act of vandalism. The Swale and other natural areas are not just empty land awaiting development. We must avoid the 15th Century *terra nullius* style thinking that served as the foundation for the alienation of land from Indigenous Nations and led to the fragmentation and conversion of natural habitats by the plough and the bulldozer. Even the Vatican has finally repudiated this type of thinking.⁸

Environmentally positive land use change occurs when volumes of earth-space are moved up rather than down the following slope:

Wild
Sub-Natural
Naturalized
Cropped
Strange
Artificial⁹

Proceeding with the Saskatoon Freeway would result in many sub-natural and naturalized ecosystems (native grasslands without large carnivores, and tame pastures, respectively) being converted to strange and artificial ones (mowed grasses and weeds, and pavement, respectively).

Rewilding has been presented as one of the solutions to both the biodiversity crisis and the climate emergency.¹⁰ Rewilding will

involve a paradigm shift in the relationship between humans and nature. The ultimate goal of rewilding is the restoration of functioning native ecosystems containing the full range of species at all trophic levels while reducing human control and pressures.¹¹

Rather than inflicting further damage on the Northeast Swale, we should be conducting ecological restoration within it and on the lands around it.

⁸ Elizabetta Povoledo. Vatican Repudiates 'Doctrine of Discovery,' Used as Justification for Colonization New York Times, March 30, 2023.

⁹ Anthony E. Joseph. 2022. Do Abstract Environmental Management Processes Degrade or Enrich Ecosystems? Perspectives on the Ecosphere [<https://wildforests.substack.com/p/do-abstract-environmental-management>].

¹⁰ Ducks Unlimited. 2022. Restoring what's been lost can be our gain [<https://www.ducks.ca/stories/biodiversity/restoring-whats-been-lost-can-be-our-gain/>]

¹¹ Steve Carver, 2021. Guiding principles for rewilding. Conservation Biology 35(6):1882-1893.

4. Recommendation

Unfortunately, many people think that we can continue forever on the current trajectory: draining and filling wetlands, cultivating and bulldozing prairies, paving over farmland, amplifying nutrient and contaminant runoff, increasing the number of vehicles, accelerating mining and material extraction, and inflating greenhouse gas emissions. More and more of us are convinced that we must think differently and put limits on our individual and collective resource appetites.

With climate change impacts becoming more and more apparent with every passing year, it is no wonder so many young people feel anxious and pessimistic about their future. Saskatoon should not court more fossil fuel dependency when there are viable alternative courses of action. We should strive to reduce the number of vehicles and distances travelled to mitigate the future impacts of energy and resource use. Stan Rowe wrote a book entitled *Home Place*, his description of the ecosphere in which humans and all of nature belong. He ends the book by stating *What Home Place needs from us is more modest furnishings, less extravagance, more tender loving care.*¹²

Do not approve any aspect of the Saskatoon Freeway. In these times of declining biodiversity, worsening air and water quality, growing climate instability, and increasing human health risks, rejecting freeway expansion is the only ethical choice.

¹² J. Stan Rowe, 1990. *Home Place: Essays on Ecology*. NeWest Publishers, Edmonton, AB.